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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3941  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3800  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4511  
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000218

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EEB; COMMERCE FOR DSTARKS/EHOUSE

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: PRESIDENT BERDIMUHAMEDOV'S FEBRUARY  
1-2 TRIP TO FRANCE

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Both France and Turkmenistan view President Berdimuhamedov's February 1-2 visit to France as a success, according to French Charge Henri Leval. In addition to meetings with France's top leadership, Berdimuhamedov presided at a Turkmen-French Business Forum meeting, attended by 100 French companies interested in doing business in Turkmenistan. A number of agreements were signed, including one between Turkmenistan's Ministry of Energy and a number of European companies to upgrade Ashgabat's electrical grid. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) French Charge Henri Leval briefed us on President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov's February 1-2 visit to France. Leval termed the visit "historic" since this was the first visit of a Turkmen Head of State to France. Originally, the visit was to extend for three days, but the Turkmen side decided against it. Leval described the visit as "very good," and said the Turkmen have expressed their gratitude to the French for how everything went.

13. (C) Leval said the first day consisted of a lunch with President Sarkozy, and a private dinner that evening with French businessmen from Total, Bouygues, and others. On February 2, Berdimuhamedov had a meeting at UNESCO where he discussed making the Karakum desert a world heritage site as well as how best to promote Turkmen culture to an international audience. Berdimuhamedov also met that day with President of the French Senate Gerard Larcher. The Turkmen President toured the Louvre and Notre Dame, and Turkmen state-run newspapers printed a picture of him gazing up at the Mona Lisa.

TURKMEN-FRENCH BUSINESS FORUM MEETING

14. (C) Berdimuhamedov and the Turkmen officials who traveled with him attended a meeting of the Turkmen-French Business Forum on February 2 at the Ritz Hotel. (NOTE: Currently, 17 French companies operate in Turkmenistan on 67 different projects, mostly in the field of construction. END NOTE.) Representatives of 100 French businesses already active or

interested in investigating the Turkmenistan market were present. Leval said the French tried to push for a question and answer session, but the Turkmen refused. Instead, Berdimuhamedov delivered a short five-minute statement at the start of the event. He noted that the viability of the Turkmen economy was validated by the fact that it survived the recent economic crisis with few damages. He invited the assembled guests to work in his country's oil and gas sector, including in the Caspian and to sell modern oil and gas extraction technology. He also invited them to work in textiles, the chemical industry, tourism, and construction, especially infrastructure building.

¶5. (C) Leval said the Turkmen were quite particular about the arrangements for the Business Forum. Berdimuhamedov had brought his own cook and insisted on serving Turkmen food. He also brought a group of Turkmen dancers for the entertainment. Leval opined that most of the 120 visas the French Embassy issued related to this visit seemed to go to people as a reward for something else, as they did not really play any role in the visit itself.

#### SIGNED AGREEMENTS

¶6. (C) A signing ceremony was held at Hotel Montegnant. Berdimuhamedov and French Prime Minister Francois Fillon signed a Protocol complementing the 1994 convention between the MFAs of the two countries. They also signed a convention creating a mixed-economic bilateral commission that will meet annually. Turkmen Minister of Culture Gulmyrat Myradov and French Minister of Culture Frederic Mitterand signed an

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agreement on culture, science, education and information. The two men also signed an agreement between the museums of both countries on cooperation. Leval explained that the museum agreement will provide a framework for better cooperation on restoration of Turkmen antiquities. In addition, it makes the possibility of sharing museum collections easier. He noted that in 1998, the two sides had discussed sending items from the Museum in Goek Depe for display at the Louvre. However, the Turkmen at the time said a Soviet-era law prevented export of antiquities.

¶7. (C) Leval said the commercial agreement signed was a 100 million euro deal between Turkmenistan's Ministry of Energy and several European companies, including ENEX, Schreder, Schneider Electric, and EADS to upgrade the power grid in Ashgabat. The project will be handled in stages and this agreement only covered the preliminary stage.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: These high-level visits are very important to the Turkmen and to President Berdimuhamedov in particular. The French will likely be rewarded in the future with commercial contracts. While Leval described the electric grid contract as preliminary, it is quite likely the European companies participating will get the contract for the entire job. END COMMENT.  
CURRAN